

As I've gotten older, I've discovered a very disturbing truth about myself... I don't think I'm very 'Australian'.

The typical Australian, is a 'sports-lover' (you see), and for a bloke, that means being 'hooked' on watching cricket and football of the various codes (which I don't)...

The reason our sports stars are paid enormous salaries, is because of the income that these sports generate – The advertising dollar, generally generated by spectators – and most of them watching from the air-conditioned comfort of their lounge room...

And you see, because I'm so 'un-Australian', I just don't 'get this' – the excitement – the enthusiasm – the cheering on from the armchair – the cheers of victory at the scoring of a try (as if somehow it's been as a result of the exuberance emanating from 'my little lounge room') – Yes!!!! We've done it!!!

And of course, because I am so thoroughly 'un-Australian', nor do I understand the comments from the spectator, when it all doesn't go so well... A catch is dropped "Oh, come on, you're useless" ... A pass is miss-timed, the receiver fumbles, and the ball's lost... "Oh, what are you doing?" (as if the one passing comment, would do far better)

And then comes the post-match, or post season analytics, as once again, the armchair experts, and the masters of the remote discuss:

- *who's good;*
- *who's useless;*
- *who needs to get his act into gear;*
- *who needs to stay;*

- *who needs to go;*
- *who should be captain; and*
- *who needs to retire*

But what particularly bemuses me, is the way the master of the remote, finds absolutely no disparity / incongruity in the way they can be so scathing and so condemning, of very talented and hard-training sports-men/women, who have risen to play at a national level,,,,, while they've managed to achieve mastering a remote...

I guess, that's the difference between a participant and a spectator.

And as the Gospel of Mark unfolds, we're going to be exposed to essentially 3 groups of people:

- The follower – or the disciple of Jesus;
- The opposition to Jesus; and
- The hordes of spectators...

And as we study this book of Mark, I reckon you and I, are going to have to constantly grapple with the question, “Am I a disciple of Jesus? Or Am I a spectator?”...

And we'll discover (at the conclusion of Mark), that the spectators, far from being any kind of followers of Jesus, are actually the **opposition** to Jesus. So it might **seem** that there's 3 groups, but at the end, as we encounter the trial and the crucifixion of Jesus, we're going to discover that there's only 2 – the disciples of Jesus, and those who are against Jesus...

So, let's pick up where we left off last week. Jesus' home country was up in the north of Israel, in the more rural areas of "Galilee". But then he headed South to Judah – alright, so He's more into the bible-belt now (Jerusalem, the religious capital, is in Judah)...

But once John the Baptist was arrested, the time had arrived for Jesus to begin preaching. And Mark picks up the story, back up in the North, in Jesus' home-district of "Galilee". And Jesus is preaching, pretty-much the same message that John The Baptist was. **"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."**

And as He walks along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, He comes across 2 brothers who are fisherman, fishing, with a net... And He says to Simon and Andrew, **"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."** ¹⁸ And **immediately** they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zebedee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ And **immediately** he called them, and **they** left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.

Isn't that incredible??? (Come on – follow me, and away they went)

Now, when **Luke** told the story of the calling of the Disciples, he filled the story out a bit more – He revealed more details, such that:

- the fisherman heard Jesus teach; and
- **then** they had a miraculous catch of fish,

and so **Luke** builds a bit of a picture of **why** they would leave everything to follow Jesus...

But that's not the point that **Mark** is trying to get across to **his** readers. What **Mark** sees as important, and what **he's** trying to get **us** to understand, is the call of Jesus, to follow Him... and how we should respond to it... When Jesus calls, what is required, is **immediate** action: The immediate response of dropping everything that we **once** saw as “important”, and doing exactly what He's called us to do – follow Him...

Immediately they left their nets and followed Him.

You might think that's crazy... These blokes – employees – businessmen – leaving their jobs – leaving their business – leaving their livelihood, to follow somebody they hardly knew...

Becoming a disciple of Jesus, is an echo of V15: **repent and believe**... And now we've got “Leave and follow”

Now, that doesn't mean we all have to leave our jobs; (although if you're a drug-dealer, that might be a good idea). We don't all have to leave our businesses... **But** we do all have to leave something... Anything that distracts us from the call of God, has to go...

One of the saddest times in my life, was when I realised my plan of one day owning my own farm, was something that had to go, so I could follow Jesus... God's plan was different to my plan (you see), so I had to leave behind my dream – I had to leave behind my plan, to follow Him...

But you see, when Jesus calls us, He calls us with a purpose. He doesn't call us for who we are – He calls us, for what we will become. Jesus didn't call Andrew and Simon because they were fishers of men... Jesus called simple, ordinary (probably uneducated) fisherman, and He said: **"Follow me, and I will make you become fishers of men."**

Here's a very important truth about being a disciple of Jesus: Not only do we repent and leave stuff behind when we first begin to follow Jesus... As we continue to follow Jesus, the Holy Spirit is going to be doing His continuing transformational work in our lives, as we become the new creation that God wants us to be...

In fact, I'd be so blunt as to say, "If I'm still pretty much the same person as what I was 10 years ago, I'm probably more of a spectator, than I am a disciple of Jesus... Being a disciple of Jesus, is all about 'becoming' ... – It's not about 'remaining' – it's about 'becoming' ...

As the disciples walked day-by-day with Jesus:

- He taught, and they learned;
- He did, and they copied;
- He led, and they followed,

learning all the time as they did...

That's how Jesus **made** them **become** fishers of men. That's what Jesus was – a fisher of men... And being with Jesus, He made them become like Himself...

And as **we** walk day-by-day with Jesus, He will make us become more and more like Him. Spectators are those who are content to “be” – they're content to remain as they are.... Disciples are those who “become”...

So, biblical scholars, make the point, that what Jesus is doing here (calling individuals to follow Him), is pretty much in line with what a Rabbi of the day would do...

Jesus gets called “Rabbi” a few times in this Gospel – what is a Rabbi???

Well, later on, “Rabbi” became a religious office – somebody would get ‘ordained’ to become a Rabbi, after they had been trained appropriately... But at this stage, the term “Rabbi” was a title of ‘respect’ or ‘honour’ given to a teacher – it meant “master”... And it would be like an ‘apprentice’ Scribe, or an ‘apprentice’ teacher of the Law, would sit under the teaching of a respected Scribe / Teacher of the Law, and they would call that person “Rabbi”...

But there was something different about Jesus, that set Him apart from the Scribes & the Teachers of the Law & the Rabbis...

The first thing that set Him apart, was the sort of person He would call to become a disciple... Jesus called Country lads, of little or no distinction / education – rough lads – Fishermen; zealots; tax collectors....

The **second** thing that set Jesus apart, was the source of His authority. When Jesus taught at the Synagogues, **they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes [did].**

How did the Scribes teach? *Well, pretty much like the academia of today. Most scholars will build on the work of others... Alright, so if anybody's ever had to write an assignment for a University course, you know what I'm talking about here – (actually even writing an assignment for High School)...*

*You can't just pull facts 'out of the blue', and assume "It's obvious – everybody knows this" ... If you want to state a fact, you need to reference a quote... And the **Scribes** would quote the great Rabbis as precedent for their teaching... Alright, so they'd get up and say (Rabbi So-and-so said this), and they'd 'hang their hat' on what the well-respected Rabbi said.*

But Jesus didn't do that. Jesus didn't "quote" the great and well-known Rabbis... He spoke straight from the Word of God, and He spoke with Authority.

And His teaching, wasn't His only authority. Jesus had **Spiritual** authority.

You know, wherever the Gospel is preached, Satan tries to disrupt it... And as soon as people began to recognise the authority of Jesus, **immediately** there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit. And he cried out, ²⁴ “What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are...

Well, would you look at that – a man possessed by a demon, right there in the synagogue... What would a demon be doing in a house of God???

Did you know, even in a church, demons will seek to disrupt... There was a man in that synagogue (he'd probably been going there for years – we don't know – we're not told), but even though he was possessed by a demon, he could happily attend, and not be challenged... But when Jesus got up to preach, he heard a teacher with whom he had nothing in common..

And so he cried out against Jesus. And Jesus said “**Shut up!**ⁱ And come out of Him!”

And we shouldn't be naïve – we need to be aware – that in many churches today, not only do unrepentant sinners go unchallenged, but **pure evil**, manages to go unchallenged. The teaching is so corrupt – the preaching so distorted – the Gospel so anaemic, that pure evil goes unchallenged...

But when the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ **is** preached with authority – when the word of God **is** taught with authority, evil cannot stand it....

When the authority of the word of God challenges us, and cuts deep to the very core of our being, we cannot remain unmoved... At the word of God, we either repent or we flee... Disciples of Jesus repent; Enemies of Jesus make a ruckus and flee...

And this is true on many levels... The Gospel message, preached with Holy Spirit power, will challenge every single one of us... (I can guarantee you that). It will challenge **me**. It will challenge you... If we want to turn up to church and not be challenged, we're in the wrong church. When the Gospel is preached, it will **offend** us. It will rip away, every last remnant of that self-deceptive image of self-righteousness that we have of ourselves...

And so, when the word of God is taught with power, we will either repent or flee... Find a preacher who's not so hard on us... Find a 'gospel' that doesn't demand I change....

But this man (possessed by pure evil) knew who Jesus was:
²⁴ "What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are – the Holy One of God."

Well, of course the answer to his questions, are "Yes". "Yes, I have come to destroy you. Yes, I am the Holy One of God"...

But this early on, Jesus didn't want that publicity. Nor do I think, did He really want the testimony of demons either....

You know, some people today feel they deserve a few Spiritual 'Brownie-points', because "Yeah, I believe in God..." But even demons believe in God, and they shudder...

Some spectators believe in Jesus, but they're not followers of Jesus – they're not His disciples.

Anyway, Jesus commanded the demon to come out of him, and with convulsions and a loud cry, out it came...

And that made the people even **more** amazed, and perplexed... "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him." ²⁸ And at once his fame spread everywhere throughout all the surrounding region of Galilee.

Alright, from this point on, people are starting to realise there's something special about Jesus... But they didn't connect the dots... We've got spectators beginning to gather, but when He taught, and when He drove the demon out, their response was, "wonder" – It didn't lead to "belief", but "wonder"

You know, I've heard it said, a number of times, "*All God has to do, is do 'this' – then I'll believe Him.*" Or "*All God has to do, is do 'that', and I'll believe Him...*" They won't... And

that's what the Gospel of Mark is very clear about – “Those who follow Jesus when He calls, will become believers.” Whereas **most** who come along ‘for a look’ because they’ve seen a sign, will remain spectators... They might be filled with ‘wonder’, but their wonder doesn’t move them to belief...

Righto, next scene: **Immediately**, He left the synagogue, and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. **Immediately** they then told Jesus how Simon’s mother-in-law was crook with a high fever... And here we have Mark’s first recorded miraculous healing by Jesus. And with the fever gone, she gets up to serve Him... I guess that’s an example of thankful devotion...

Disciples of Jesus, will have a thankful devotion to Jesus...

But then of course, like flies to the honey-pot, along come all the spectators.

The whole city were there on their door-step. He healed many (It doesn’t say He healed everybody – He healed many), and cast out many demons...

Next scene: Jesus gets up early in the morning (while it’s still dark) (Some of us are used to that. Some of us can’t even comprehend that that’s possible), and He headed off to a desolate place to pray...

No matter how busy we are; No matter how engrossed we are in ministry, even,,,, we always need to take time to pray...

It was Martin Luther who famously said: “I have so much to do that I shall spend the first 3 hours in prayer.”

But Jesus' prayer time was interrupted. The disciples found Him, “Everyone’s looking for you”... The spectators wanted to see so more... But Jesus' purpose wasn't to provide a spectacle. His purpose was to preach. And not just in the one place. And so He moved from town to town, preaching in the synagogues, and casting out demons.

But when Jesus healed a leper, and the healed leper couldn't keep quiet about it, the news spread, and Jesus was instantly famous. People came flocking to Him, from all over the place...

It got that way, that if He wanted to enter a town, He had to go incognito, or risk getting mobbed...

Righto, that's as far as we're going to go for today.

And we can read all this, and we can imagine the excitement that maybe the disciples might have felt, about the increasing numbers, and the growing popularity of the one who had chosen **them** to be His disciples...

But Jesus knew where it was all headed... He knew the crowds. They weren't followers – they weren't disciples. They were “spectators”... Oh, there certainly would've been a few followers amongst them, but most of them were just (rubber-neckers / tyre-kickers) spectators – just there for a look...

And that's where we're going to leave it today...

- Are we disciples of Jesus? Or are we spectators?
- What's the focus of what we do at church? Is our aim to provide entertainment –to provide a spectacle that will draw people along ‘for a look’???

Or is it a place for disciples of Jesus to worship?

Is it a place for disciples of Jesus to be taught and to grow?

- What's the focus of our lives? To be (to remain)? Or to become?

‘To be’ what we are and how we are / to be focused on achieving **our** dreams?

Or is our focus on “What we are to become?” – More like the Christ, whom we follow???

Are we spectators? Or are we disciples of Jesus?????

Let's talk about it.

- How does Jesus want me to be more of a disciple and less of a spectator?
- How does following Jesus take me from what ‘what I am’ or ‘what I was’, to what He wants me to become???

ⁱ The Greek word *phimōthēti*, *be silent* (25), is better translated as ‘be muzzled’: it is both strong and blunt, like ‘shut up’ in modern colloquial English. The main emphasis is on the silencing of the demon, to maintain the so-called ‘messianic secret’.

